

INFORMATION TO MINISTER

Coutts Border Crossing Blockage

PURPOSE

To update the Minister on the status of the Roadblockage at the Coutts Border Crossing.

BACKGROUND

- On January 29th, 2022 a National Convoy of trucks from across Canada arrived in Ottawa to protest the on-going requirements of both Canada and the USA for long haul truck drivers to show proof of vaccination in order to cross the border.
- A number of events were organized across Alberta to show support for the national protest.
- These included vehicle convoys in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and in the greater Edmonton area, culminating in a protest at the Legislature.
- While there were disruptions and slowdowns, RCMP, EPS and Sheriffs were able to manage these events without significant concerns or any arrests.
- An event was planned to see trucks conduct a convoy to all 3 border crossings in Alberta, Coutts, Carway and Del Bonita.
- No trucks attended to the Carway and Del Bonita crossings.
- In excess of 1000 trucks drove from Lethbridge in a convoy to the Coutts Border crossing.
- At the crossing large numbers of vehicles were involved in a rotating drive down to the crossing and back, in a circuit, slowing traffic but not stopping it.
- Police had been in continuous contact with the organizers of the event, outlining the need to maintain emergency vehicle access to the town and traffic flow across the boarder.
- Information was provided to all trucks and vehicles participating in the convoy outlining the restrictions on actions such as complete blockage of the highway.
- Until mid-afternoon, the convoy and protest was proceeding in a manner that was consistent with the organizers' plans.
- In late afternoon a number of vehicles stopped in both the North and South bound lanes of Hwy 4, completely blocking traffic.
- Police and organizers attempted to speak with the splinter group of approximately 250 trucks, to obtain cooperation and an opening of the crossing.
- Efforts continued into the evening but were not effective.
- Another convoy of 50 to 75 vehicles gathered near Edmonton on January 30th and traveled through the City to the Legislative grounds at 1400 for a further protest.
- EPS and Sheriffs are engaged and monitoring this event as well.

- While there were roadway obstructions in the and around the Legislative grounds and slow downs around the city, no significant issues were experienced and the event ended without major incident.
- As of noon, January 30, 2022, there remains approximately 247 trucks blocking the highway to the boarder.
- Police are communicating with them, though there is no apparent leader.
- Based upon their communication, a number of the truck operators in the blockage have indicated that they would now be willing to leave if given the opportunity but can not due to others blocking their way.
- During the evening of January 30th, RCMP were able to secure a route out of the protest for operators who no longer wished to participate.
- Approx. 30 drivers and their trucks left the protest / blockage.
- The RCMP have had tow companies in the area decline to assist in any enforcement action. They have secured a company out of Calgary to assist when needed.

Current Status

- RCMP have created a checkpoint north of the blockage, in order to ensure that once people leave they are not allowed to come back, and to prevent any re-supply or bolstering in numbers at the blockage.
- The RCMP are gathering specialized resources, working with towing companies and their Special Tactics and Operations unit, to prepare to begin taking enforcement action in relation to the group.
- Consideration on how to effect mass arrests of large numbers of more persons, if necessary, as well as manage the seizure and movement of 250 trucks if necessary are being made.
- RCMP are considering their authorities under the Provincial Highway Traffic Act, the Critical Infrastructure Defense Act as well as the Criminal Code and are engage with Crown prosecutors on the same.
- It is anticipated that should negotiations not be successful today, they will be in a position to begin enforcement action on January 31st.
- While the organizer has been cooperative and helping to try to engage with the splinter group, the RCMP have indicated that they are considering all avenues of accountability for the organizer as well as those who might refuse to leave.
- RCMP are working with Canada Border Services Agency and US officials to extend the operating hours of the Del Bonita crossing (normally open Monday to Friday, 0900-1800) and the Carway crossing (normally open 7 days a week, 0800-1800) so as to facilitate necessary commercial and private traffic seeking to cross the border.
- Sheriffs are on site and providing support to RCMP.
- Sheriffs will also assist in terms of prisoner transport if necessary once the RCMP begin enforcement action.

- Corrections is prepared to provide support in terms of the use of the Lethbridge Correction Center as a short term holding facility for large numbers of arrested persons, pending their processing and either release or bail hearings, if needed.
- RCMP are examining an alternative route to re-open the Coutts border crossing to other vehicle traffic.
- RCMP are working with Sheriffs to attempt to ensure the Carway and Del Bonita crossings are not also blocked by further protests.

ANALYSES

- The highway blockage is not at the physical border crossing itself, and as such the agency of jurisdiction is the RCMP as the Provincial Police Service in Alberta.
- Should the Government of Alberta wish to seek any form of injunction, Transportation would be the lead Ministry.
- RCMP indicate they feel they have sufficient authorities with the Highway Traffic Act, Critical Infrastructure Defense Act and Criminal Code of Canada to allow them to address the situation, once resources are on site.
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APPROVED:

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